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ABSTRACT

The state of the art of assessment is viewed in light of practical and realistic options. The classical terminologies of achievement, validity, reliability, internal and external assessment, prediction, and formative and summative evaluation, are often referred to in the address, with the realization that those presenting later papers would not be doing so in a vacuum. A brief historical sketch of curriculum concerns as advanced by African ministers during ministers' conferences is presented. The conferences ranged from the Addis Ababa Conference 1961, the Lagos Conference 1976, the Monrovia Declaration 1979, to the Harare Conference 1982. Each conference noted certain implications for curriculum development and stressed the relevancy of economic and social development. The major program areas of UNESCO's second mid-term programs are referred to in view of UNESCO's concern for educational development. The address refers to existing instruments and warns, "we should be more belligerent whether we borrow money or memory." The paper urges the participant to work towards effective assessment kits and the reduction of educational wastage of youth. (Author/DWH)

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR THE NINTH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT (IAEA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE : JUNE 1983

PROBLEMS OF ASSESSING THE NEW CURRICULA BEING INTRODUCED IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

MALAWI, BLANTYRE, 13 - 17 JUNE 1983

BY A.N. BOMA

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ABSTRACT

PROBLEMS OF ASSESSING THE NEW CURRICULA BEING INTRODUCED IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

by Dr. A.N. BOMA

This paper captioned as "Problems of Assessing the New Curricula Being Introduced in African Countries" was presented on behalf of the Director General of Unesco at the Ninth International Association for Educational Assessment held in Malawi, Blantyre from 13-17 June 1983. Taking into account the themes and sub-themes to be presented at the conference, the issue of the curriculum from which other components of education evolved had to be the major concern of the paper in this regard. The assumption was that substantial experiences of the authors of the various papers to be presented had to identify with the issues in one form or the other.

The keynote address was self generating in that it took to task the pros and cons of educational assessment. Its precursory nature illuminated the thinking and perspective of the conference which echoed complemantarity and affinity for the issues raised. The state of the art of assessment, the paper emphasized, had to be viewed in the light of practical and realistic options.

The classical terminologies-achievement, validity, reliability, internal and external assessment, prediction, formative and summative evaluation, scaling, criterion referenced testing etc. were often referred to in the address realising that those presenting papers were not doing so in a vacuum.

A brief historical stretch of curriculum concerns as advanced by African ministers during conferences of ministers was presented. The stretch ranged from the Addis Ababa Conference 1961, the Lagos Conference 1976, the Monrovia Declaration 1979 to the Harare Conference 1982. Each of these conferences alluded to, noted certain implications for curriculum development and stressed on relevancy towards economic and social development. The 14 major programme areas of Unesco's second mid-term programmes were also referred to in the light of Unesco's concern for educational development.

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While referring to existing instruments e.g. that of Piaget, the paper warned "we should be more belligerent whether we borrow money or memory". The paper did not of course minimize the sadness of stratification of children by unscrupulous examination systems into pass and fail thus promoting a social class system and consequently rendering those who fail, to think that there is nothing in their purses because there is nothing in their skulls.

As a concluding note, the paper endeared the participant to work towards effective assessment kits and thus reduced educational wastage of youth.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS FOR THE NINTH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT (IAEA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE : JUNE 1983

PROBLEMS OF ACCESSING THE NEW CURRICULA BEING INVOLVED IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES MALAWI, BLANTYRE, 13 - 17 JUNE 1983

BY A.N. BOMA

Ladies and gentlemen, please permit me to express our profound thanks personally and on behalf of the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow and succintly that of the Director of BREDA, Mr. Baba Akib Haïdara the regional representative of the Director General for inviting UNESCO to participate in such an important international conference on the African soil. I can hardly minimize this privilege and honour accorded me by the Director General to represent him.

Realising the interest of UNESCO and that of Member States in educational development, it would have been futile not to have extended this invitation to UNESCO. The Director General's interest and devodness to educational advancement and in the themes you have set for the conference are manifest by the delegatory participation. Therefore I wish to declare in advance my appreciation to the organizers of the conference, those presenting papers, other participants and the Government of Malawi, the Minister of Education and through him to the President Dr. Hastings Banda. Being very enchanted with the international intellectual contributors to the conference, it is my wish that their efforts will end in success and thus alleviate our educational system from intellectual indictement.

I hope that during the conference there would be a mutual exchange of information and it is to be expected that the orchestration at this conference should emphasise aspects of relevancy and realities taking into account the economic, social and cultural realities of the African continent.

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The Chairman of the conference Mr. Donton S.J. Mkandawire and other organisers have taken cognizance of the problems of assessment and they have mobilized international scholars to participate at the conference. We hope that these scholars will make the case for this controversal issue and it is nice to think that we have come together to collaborate over the issue in question. Please keep an open mind and share with me the impression that the international representation at the conference reflects our desires for the unity of mankind and demonstrates the fact that education transcends all barriers.

It comes to me as no surprise that those of us who have gone rusty should consider ourselves fortunate since we will be passing through another stage of metamorphosis by listening to these warmful deliberations. Whatever will be the out-come of this conference, it is sure to attract other educators.

To those presenting papers I intend to make the observation that you are desperatly courageous in venturing into this controversal subject and I can only wish you good luck and good work.

I am sorry that my opening remarks about assessments may be a little bit coy and provocative because these remarks will agitate some criticisms since education is a product of its own vice.

As to the themes under presentation and discussions there is no doubt whatsoever that your selection and the integration of the sub-themes go to demonstrate your concern for relevancy in education and your awareness of the impiging problems of assessment both of which have a direct relationship with curriculum reforms. The sub-themes can be regarded as common denominators which promote the associability of assessment in general.

The non-deliniation of the out-of-school system adds another muster to the wide scope of your consideration because most of the assessment techniques have been confined to the structured or regular school systems. The authors of these themes are understandably not interested in a blend complacency.

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The themes are also very pertinent because a lot of educationist are disoriented about assessment, evaluation or examination. One would hope that these themes will converge to a production fruit for future multiplication.

At the time of writing this paper it dawned on me that it would be of some interest to the participants if I highlighted UNESCO's interest and that of African Ministers of Education as to their current and past thinking on educational development in Africa. These dictums have had social, economic and intellectual implications. This conference can do no better than try to emulate these authors thus marshalling their intellectual capacities to provide leadership and encouragement to these prepondered recommendations. There is no reason to suppose otherwise.

Some of the notable conferences were :

The Addis Ababa Conference in May 1961. It was involved with educational planning, qualitative and quantitative education for national development. It stressed technical and vocational education, agricultural education, education of girls, increase and improvement of the quality of higher education, adult education, reform of teaching materials, etc.

The Lagos Conference in 1976 stressed amongst previous issues the need for relevancy in education as this was necessary for the socio-economic and cultural development of Africa.

The Monrovia declaration of heads of States and Government of the OAU held in Monrovia, Liberia in July 1979 stressed the need for collective self-reliance in economic and social development. Amongst other things the ministers stressed the need for human resource development, elimination of illiteracy, promotion of technology, attainment of self-sufficiency in food production, preservation, protection and improvement of the environment and reinforcement of cultural heritage.

The Harare Conference of Ministers of Education met in Harare, Zimbabwe from late June to early July 1982 and examined the recommendations

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of the previous conferences. At this conference the Director General of UNESCO stressed also amongst other things the role of higher education, the relevancy in education giving prominence to the school curricula and stressed the establishment of school farms. He also stressed the equality of access to education and recall the high illiteracy rate in Africa. It was his hope that research in all educational aspects would be intensified and should be oriented towards the relevancy of social and economic development and the delegates at the conference stressed the need for relevancy in the curricula of universities.

Looking at the concerns of these conferences one sees the chronic problems facing African countries and it is to these problems that our energies and talents should be directed if we must consider relevancy of education as the primary contributor to our economic, social and cultural development.

As you well know UNESCO's programmes are concieved with the consultation of member states, the realities of the situation and in the framework of educational research and philosophies. Therefore its activities are pertinent to educational establishment and advancement. Having the capacity to function effectively, UNESCO frequently assesses its programmes with a view to developing new programmes which are relevant for development.

For the future, UNESCO's second medium-term plan for 1984-1986 with its activities defined biennially prospects its activities and assesses their accomplishments before venturing into new activites. The medium-term plan covers several areas of interest in education rather in a global manner as major programmes.

These cover issues such as :

- Reflection on world problems and future oriented studies.
- Education for all
- Communication in the service of man

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- The formulation and application of education policies
- Education, training and society
- The sciences and their application to development
- Information systems and access to knowledge
- Principles, methods and strategies of action for development
- Science, technology and society
- The human environment and terrestrial and marine resources
- Culture and the future
- The elimination of prejudice, intolerence, racism and apartheid
- Peace, international understanding, human rights and the rights of peoples
- Status of women.

All these major programmes which are further broken down into sub-programmes should register in your minds the scope, magnitude, concerns and activities of UNESCO towards educational development in the world. UNESCO ensures that it operates within the various fields of its competencies.

UNESCO also cooperates with Member States in promoting educational requests thus taking into consideration the sovereignty of the various governments cooperating with educational institutions in various activities and focusing its attention on capacities development.

As I venture into the subject of the conference, I would advanced no argument for the generality in using the words examination, testing, evaluation and assessment interchangeably and so save myself a luxury of this ambiguity. These terms have been defined differently by educators so as to avoid antilogy. There is a debatable acceptance of the known assessment techniques. Each of them runs against some scholary interventions. Even though we may be on the same side of an intellectual exercise it is sometimes not easy to agree or accept every thing. We need to be shaken from the complacency of traditional forms of assessment.

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With all due respect for Piaget who has demonstrated a formidable scholary reputation in the field of testing we should not be dettered in talking about fundamental differences. We have always tended to apply his findings on African children in the absence of something better but we should be more belligerent whether we borrow money or memory. No one is following closely on the heels of theoreticians because out of of theories facts and practical activities are evolved. It is to be expected that you would exercise a sense of proportion and let the audience absorb the realities.

My assumption is that somewhere during the presentation of papers or during the discussions at the conference these words would crop up and can thus be coached with some degree of exemplification.

You may/by design or by shear incidence be touching on topics such as achievement, validity, reliability, internal and external assessment, prediction, formative and summative evaluation, scaling, criterion referenced testing, to mention but a few and there is every reason to expect that you will zero in on such techniques which have utility in the African situation and thus ensure relevancy for we should not be dealing with traditions of today's past except conceived and metted in the developmental background of the environment or society. The reality of our situations is very necessary and we as men and women of errors also make errors which transcends our assessment situations and thus reference is always made to chanced errors. Errors are part of human experiences and thus lead us to improvements.

Please rest assured and be reminded that UNESCO is very much concerned with improving the quality of education and views assessments as an integral part in the improvement process. Thus, let it be noted that for the characteristics of assessment to be meaningful they should have as their main purpose that of promoting relevancy in education. If assessment is not promoting relevancy, it would still stand out as another sterotyped method of making resolutions with no solutions.

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The field of educational measurement is concerned with problems in measurement theory (the validity and reliability of measurement), the development of attainment and other tests used in education, and, most importantly, the use of measurement in educational evaluation to improve instructions and facilitate learning.[1]

It is rather perjordical to think that educational assessment has become the sole monopoly of educationists forgetting to recognise the fact that the clientele of education (students and the public) ought to be involved. Examinations are not intended to eliminate the less gifted academic ones but to provide them with new directions for intellectual capabilities or to enable them to rediscover their effective talents in order that our formal and non-formal educational systems do not suffer.

The educator or teacher agitates the sieve containing students in order to sieve the grain from the chaff and the students who go through are classified as passed and those that fail to go through are classified as failed. After all examination is not the sole test of knowledge. There is impulse learning as well as situational learning and yet there is not the clear prognostication of examinations or assessment under these circumstances. The end-product of the teacher's concern is to take credit for the "passed" and disdain the "failed" thus stratifying the system and promoting a social class system. No one is here trying to give the dog a bad name and to kill it.

The sadness of divisibility of youth in the community can no longer be condoned. The casualties of the examinations systems are tuned into our societies as lots of wastes. The tests or examinations effectively underline the future of youth who failed to pass. The futuristic assumption of the youth who failed the examination is that there is nothing in my purse because there is nothing in my skull. Examinations whip up unemployment

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1. CK Tittle and KM Miller. Assessing Attainment, Independent Assessment and Research Centre, London England 1977. Reprinted 1977, p. VII.

and it is therefore better to get the public informed about examinations or assessment so that they can make the right decisions during recruitment exercises. Examinations are inevertible and in fact desirable if we must know where the intellectual compass is leading us to.

Implicitly we can draw something from Bruner when he said this :

> My work on early education and social class, for example, had convinced me that the educational system was in effect our way of maintaining a class system - a group at the bottom. It crippled the capacity of children in the lowest socio-economic quarter of the population to participate at full power in society and did so early and effectively.[2]

Employers turn to the preferred classification and thus pander to the whimses of the teacher's classifications. We are up against the delima of liquidating the intellectual and occupational future of our youth. "Test and examninations play an important part in the decisions which both students and teachers make ; their use by other educational organizations and employers makes them of vital concern".[3]

Here I would try to be brief because we are realizing more and more the flaws in our dictates and I am delighted that this conference is organised with this implications in mind and I prefer to leave the interventions to the authors of the conference, since there is no doubt in my mind that they have done some qualitative home-work and can provide the finer details.

While discretionally establishing this punctuation, it must be said that the cautionary period has come when education should cease to be a product of its own vice. Our educational future should not creat any societal calamities. Fortunately curriculum centres in Africa are alive to these problems of assessment and are engrossed in the search for better ways and means of assessment of educational achivements. The African Curriculum Organization (ACO) with its headquarters based in the University of Ibadan , Nigeria, has been on the run since 1975 organizing

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2. Jerome B. Bruner. The Relevance of Education. London. George Allen and Urwin Ltd. 1971, p. XI.

3. Ibid

seminars, workshops, study tours and training programmes in an effort to promote curriculum development and evaluation to ensure relevancy in education. Other ancillaries of the ACO are the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), Nairobi, Kenya, which offers a course in curriculum development and the University of Njalla, Sierra Leone which trains science educators with emphasis towards curriculum development. These efforts and those of many other educational institutions in the continent are commendable.

The classroom situations rather like a laboratory with which we have been acquainted for years may not pose many problems for assessment since we have at last some perfected tools and methods for assessment. But the question of assessment of out-of-school education (extension education) where education takes place under several intervening variables some explicit and implicit would surely present some difficulties worthy of further and future attention. UNESCO would welcome your suggestions on how these and other attendant issues of assessment can be tackled with progressive maturation inputs.

Let us hope that in the next decade our educational system cannot be underscored. The final tribute is to pay homage to all those scholars who have devoted much of their time and effort in trying to secure a break-through with this pervasive subject. This break-through may take the form of a prototype assessment kit which is curricula based and which the ordinary teacher can use in his day to day efforts. As we device our assessment instruments we should do this carefully against a back ground of educational trends and so ensure a better coherence between assessment and development.

To other participants it is the advocated hope that they will retain, extend, and stimulate all what they have learnt here in the last few days so that we can strengthen our educational innovations and renovations. Through conferences like this one we all are brought together into a learning forum because one of the ways to learning is to give and in the process of giving we learn about the weaknesses of the receiver(s)

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We will like to see the assessment of youth in relation with its group members realizing that as we have come far ahead on intellectual assessment, it would be intriguing to see how we can animate the social relevancy.

It will be a meaningful input into our educational statistics and information systems if university students may undertake assessment or surveys in educational facilities, school populations, text books, curriculum innovations, educational financing etc, so that the information may help our educational planners and policy makers in the development of viable educational programmes.

It is be expected that the impressive report which will be the end-product of this conference would be communicated to UNESCO for future cooperation in providing meaningful support and advice in maintaining and extending contacts with other educational instutions and organisations.

There is every reason to wish the conference success during the days of its deliberations and please bear with me that the views expressed are mine.